

book reviews

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Attacking Rural Poverty

Attacking Rural Poverty: How Noninformal Education Can Help. Philip H. Coombs with Manzoor Ahmed. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974. 292 pp. \$15.00.

The book reports on a study concerned with nonformal programs of education designed to increase the skills and productivity of farmers, artisans, craftsmen, and small entrepreneurs in developing nations. The study was initiated in 1971 by the World Bank and was carried out by the International Council for Educational Development. It's addressed to planners and policy makers who are concerned with improving conditions of life in the vast rural poverty areas of the world.

Author Coombs, vice chairman of the ICED, says in the introduction: "It is clearer now than perhaps it was a decade or so ago that only through concerted efforts to develop rural as well as urban areas can the people of the world's poorest nations take the first steps beyond sheer subsistence."

Experiences of a diversified sample of nonformal education programs were examined to help answer these questions:

1. How can nonformal education promote rural development?
2. Can it help fill the great gaps left by formal schools and help schools transform themselves?
3. Can poor countries afford a sizeable expansion of nonformal education?
4. How can nonformal education best be planned and evaluated?
5. How can such operational issues as organization, staffing, facilities, and educational technologies best be dealt with?
6. What are the next steps developing nations might take?
7. In what manner can external agencies help?

Three basic conclusions were reached:

1. Nonformal education—of the right kind in the right places, properly tied to complementary efforts

(greater integration with other programs—is an indispensable and potent instrument of rural development).

2. Even the poorest country—given a favorable political climate and determination by its leaders and people to build a better future—should be able to mobilize the resources and human energies for a considerable expansion of nonformal education in rural areas.
3. Developing countries can forge ahead more quickly in nonformal education if given critical types of help from the outside. There's no shortage of ways for external agencies to assist strategically. But to do so, with the greatest effect, they will be required to alter considerably their past policies, doctrines, and modes of operation.

According to the authors, experience has shown that the kind of education required to transform rural societies into a more tolerable, satisfying, and hopeful place to live isn't the kind provided by today's urban-oriented educational system. Such a system has served mainly as a transmission belt for moving talent to the cities. Obviously, new approaches are needed.

The authors recognize certain weaknesses in the study. However, anyone interested in rural development and nonformal education should find the report useful. Those of us working on rural development in this country can readily see many similarities between our experiences and those reported in this study. Such macro concepts as education and rural development are well defined.

Much of the information derived from the study, because it deals with concepts, can be applied beyond the bounds of developing nations. Extension Service personnel will find numerous references critical of Extension efforts. Open-minded assessment of these criticisms could lead, hopefully, to improvements in extension program development in the U.S. as well as in other nations.

Two physical features detract from the report: (1) a typeface and size that makes for difficulty in reading and (2) numerous typographical and grammatical errors. Nevertheless, the ideas contained in the book make it worth reading for anyone concerned with the development of rural areas.

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